



Memorandum

TO: Tourism Advisory Council

FROM: Hope Stockwell, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division Administrator

DATE: September 28, 2022

REFERENCE: 2022 Fish, Wildlife & Parks Update

Visitation at Montana's state parks remained high in 2021 after the peak season of 2020 when public interest in the outdoors surged. In the first half of 2022, visitation was slower due in part to colder, wet weather. Additionally, we expect a surge in gas prices and other inflationary impacts played a role. We await the results of our second half of 2022 visitation data. While warmer weather likely encouraged more people to go outdoors in July and August, the overall impacts of summer flooding at Yellowstone National Park and more than 50 of our fishing access sites and state parks in FWP's Administrative Regions 1, 3, and 5 is unclear. Many sites were closed or restricted for periods of time while others experienced visitor surges as a result.

With an estimated 189,517 visitors, **Giant Springs** was the most visited state park in the first half of 2022. The next most visited parks were **Flathead Lake and Spring Meadow Lake State Park**. *See attached for the full mid-year visitation report.*

Staffing and Resources

Over the past year, FWP has undertaken a major reorganization to improve consistency, provide enhanced customer service, and increase efficiencies in the newly formed Parks and Outdoor Recreation (POR) Division. Although the administrative structure for our sites is now different, our mission remains the same:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Mission

Through its employees and citizen commission and board, FWP provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

POR Responsibilities include: The Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division is responsible for visitor use, recreation management, and maintenance at state parks, fishing access sites, and wildlife management areas; river recreation management; access for hunting, fishing, and other types of recreation on public and private lands; shooting range development; and administration of trail and shooting range grant programs. In conjunction with the rest of the agency and its external partners, the Division provides valued services to the public and manages human use to ensure the long-term sustainability of Montana's scenic, historic, cultural, archaeological, recreational, and fish and wildlife resources.

POR's number one challenge across site types and programs is meeting the demands of increased use and mitigating/preventing the impacts of that use on resources. Although visitation was down in the first half of 2022, state parks visitors increased from 1.98 million in 2010 to 3.4 million in 2021 – up 28% between 2019 and 2021 alone. While visitation data is not formally collected at most fishing access sites and wildlife management areas, visitation is anecdotally at record high levels there as well.

The current hiring economy and housing shortages have presented challenges to remaining fully staffed. At Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park, for instance, we were able to provide only about half of the normally scheduled tours this season due to staffing shortages. When Yellowstone National Park closed to flooding, visitors looking for other things to do and see nearby turned to the Caverns and were disappointed more tours were not available and that 'self-tours' were not an option (to protect the resource). Some ambitious visitors attempted to bribe staff and sneak in on tours or got angry at staff over the circumstances.

In the next two years, we're seeking to be more intentional about creating a sense of ownership in the people who utilize FWP sites and resources so they can become valuable stewards in protecting and conserving them. Partnership opportunities include helping to spread the recreate responsibly messaging that already exists. See attached for an easy-to-use reference guide. More information can be found on our website at: <https://fwp.mt.gov/stateparks/recreate-responsibly>

Going Forward

Our highest priorities going forward include:

- Being the best illustration in the country of balancing recreational opportunity and protection of resources
- Increasing efficiency in internal stewardship of the resources through combination of maintenance and recreation functions in the unified division
- Keeping sites open, clean, and safe
- Ensuring clear, professional, and proactive communications from staff on all fronts
- Improving consistency for users in customer service, fees, and regulations to improve experiences and engage them in stewarding resources
- Providing and enhancing access for all including increased ADA compliance and opportunity; focused support on opportunity for underserved persons, youth, and families; adding recreation infrastructure in eastern Montana; seeking access for all recreation types using private land programs; and promoting trail connectivity across site types and land ownership

We are excited to share FWP has contracted with Hunt Design on a coordinated signage and wayfinding system for all FWP facilities, making them easily navigable and highly visible to the public. This unified system will quickly identify the breadth of sites that FWP manages and highlight our work as a leader in wildlife, recreation, access, and cultural and historic resource management. We will also better incorporate FWP Vision and Guide core values and 'Recreate Responsibly' principles. Overall, we the project to help users feel welcomed to our sites and programs and recognize their role as partners in stewardship of these public resources.

Enclosure (1)

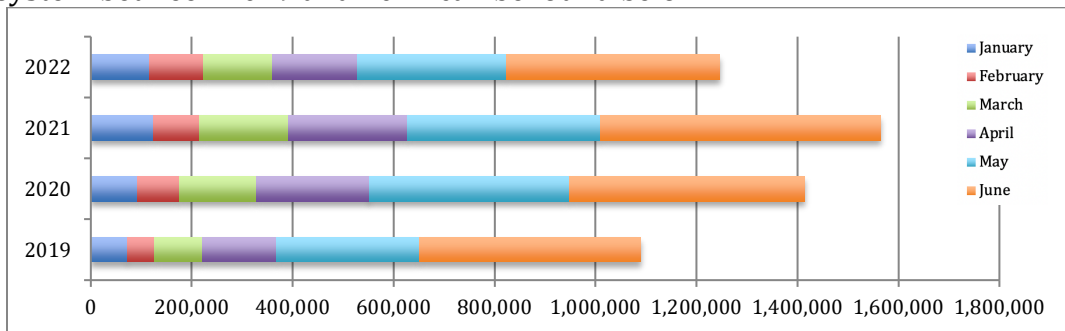


2022 Midyear Montana State Parks Visitation Report

As of August 1, 2022

Key Takeaways

- There were an estimated **1,245,627** state park visitors during the first half of 2022. Compared with last year, this represents a decrease of **20.4%**, or a net drop of an estimated **318,690** visitors. Compared with 2020, visitation fell by **11.9%**; however, estimates are **14.3%** higher than those of 2019.
- Last year, the Montana state park system's visitation grew at a record-setting pace through July as travel and tourism rebounded from shutdowns and closures in 2020 and the public turned to the outdoors. This year, things have been different for state parks as well as other public lands. Visitation pressure has diminished, in part fueled by several cold spells early in the year and subsequent cool, wet spring weather. Additionally, a surge in gas prices, and other inflationary impacts could also be playing a role in visitors' diminished propensity to travel, or travel longer distances, to recreate.
- A summary of month-by-month visitation estimates for all the Montana state park system between 2019 and 2022 can be found below:



Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	YTD Total
2019	72,608	92,121	124,361	115,953	72,608	92,121	1,089,330
2020	53,884	83,506	91,749	106,513	53,884	83,506	1,413,743
2021	94,648	151,979	175,726	137,911	94,648	151,979	1,564,317
2022	146,589	224,062	235,605	166,989	146,589	224,062	1,245,627

- With an estimated 189,517 visitors, **Giant Springs** was the most visited state park in the first half of 2022. The next most visited parks were **Flathead Lake** and **Spring Meadow Lake**. A complete list of parks and their estimated visitation levels can be found at the end of this report.

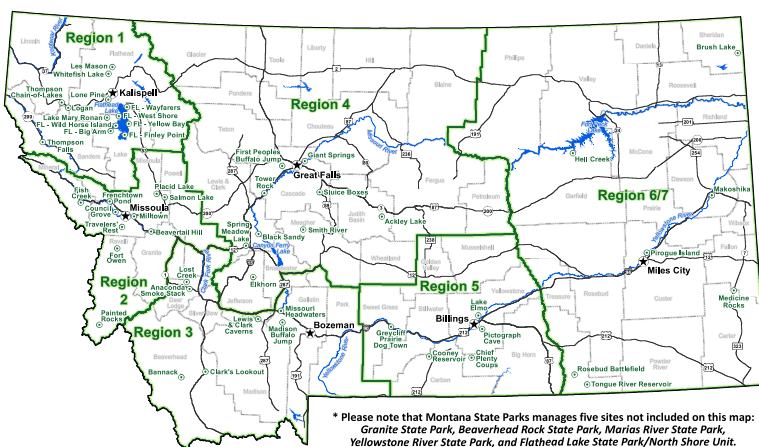
* Please see report notes at the end of this document for information about the state park system's methodological practice. Past reports can be found at: <https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/about-state-parks>.

Introduction

This report has been developed utilizing 2019-2022 visitation estimates reported by state park managers. Visitation is a term used to describe the number of individuals visiting a state park. To strive toward improving accuracy, the system's visitation methodology and reporting practices have undergone some recent changes. Please see the reporting notes at the end of this summary for further information.ⁱ

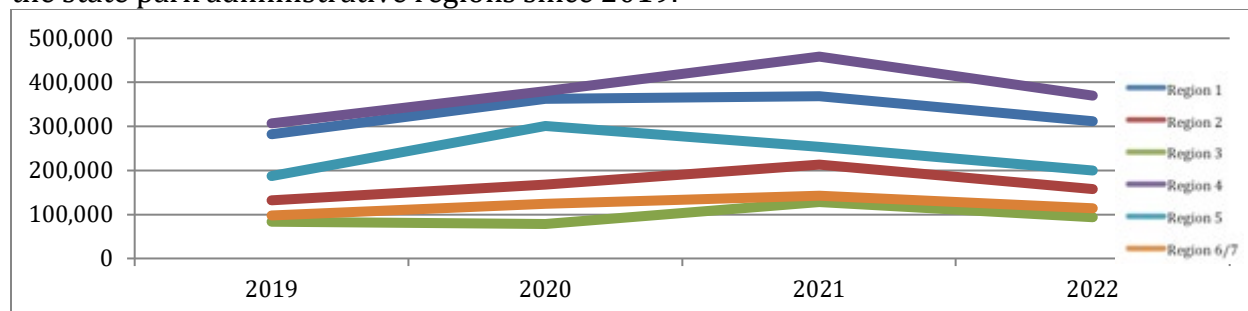
A region-by-region glimpse

The Montana state park system is sub-divided into six administrative regions with regional headquarter offices located in Kalispell (1), Missoula (2), Bozeman (3), Great Falls (4), Billings (5), and Miles City (6/7). An interesting way to look at visitation data is to see what has happened across each state park administrative region.



2019-22 YTD Estimates by State Park Administrative Region (Jan.-Jun.)

The below graph depicts how visitation during the first half of the year has trended across the state park administrative regions since 2019.



State Park Admin. Region	Jan.-Jun. 2019	Jan.-Jun. 2020	Jan.-Jun. 2021	Jan.-Jun. 2022	% of statewide total
Region 1	282,130	363,225	368,501	311,770	25.0%
Region 2	132,029	167,175	213,181	157,797	12.7%
Region 3	83,528	78,280	128,106	93,531	7.5%
Region 4	306,844	380,276	458,455	369,236	29.6%
Region 5	187,172	300,892	253,566	199,545	16.0%
Regions 6/7	97,627	123,895	142,508	113,748	9.1%
TOTAL	1,089,330	1,413,743	1,564,317	1,245,627	

When comparing year-to-date estimates for 2022 with the last few years, there are some interesting trends:

- Compared with 2021, there was a double-digit slowdown in all regions. The most significant decrease in net visitors was in Region 4, headquartered in Great Falls, where there were an estimated **89,219** less visitors. In Regions 1, 2, and 5 there was a drop of at least **54,000** visitors in each region. They are headquartered in Kalispell, Missoula, and Billings, respectively.
- Compared with 2020, only Region 3 headquartered in Bozeman, experienced growth, welcoming an estimated **15,251** more visitors this year. It stands to note, however, that this change is likely attributable to the 2020 suspension of cave tours at the park due to the COVID-19 health pandemic. Across all regions, the most significant drop between 2020 and 2022 occurred in Region 5, which saw an estimated **101,347** less visitors. It should be noted that 2020 was a year that Cooney Reservoir, as with other parks, experienced record-setting visitation levels.
- Compared with 2019, estimates for 2022 are higher in all regions. Region 4 leads the way with an increase of approximately **62,392** more visitors while Region 1 welcomed an estimated 29,640 more visitors. All regions welcomed at least **10,000** more visitors this year than in 2019.

Admin. Region	Comparison with 2021		Comparison with 2020		Comparison with 2019	
	# Visits	%Change	# Visits	%Change	# Visits	%Change
Region 1	-56,731	-15.4%	-51,455	-14.2%	+29,640	10.5%
Region 2	-55,384	-26.0%	-9,378	-5.6%	+25,768	19.5%
Region 3	-34,575	-27.0%	+15,251	+19.5%	+10,003	12.0%
Region 4	-89,219	-19.5%	-11,040	-2.9%	+62,392	20.3%
Region 5	-54,021	-21.3%	-101,347	-33.7%	+12,373	6.6%
Regions 6/7	-28,760	-20.2%	-10,147	-8.2%	+16,121	16.5%
TOTAL	-318,691 est. visits		-168,116 est. visits		+156,297 est. visits	

What do these numbers tell us and what are some forward looking perspectives?

- Data for 2022 seems to support the notion that the spikes in visitation growth experienced in 2020-21 have subsided. Although weather could be a factor for 2022, as mentioned earlier, it does appear that the high level of visitors to state parks has retreated.
- During 2020-21, Montana's state parks were unique in remaining open to visitors with just some temporary closures of visitor centers and other opportunities. This may have attracted more visitors than usual to the state, and in turn impacted some of the growth observed. Reinforcing this sentiment, a 2021 study found that Montana's travel industry recovered more quickly than

other states' and was not as deeply impacted by the pandemic as much of the country.¹

- Montana's recent population growth could also be a factor in state park visitation expansion. A 2021 study revealed that many new residents cited finding a desirable natural environment and access to outdoor recreation as key reasons for moving here.²
- While visitation may be on the decline, park managers have observed that there is still high use during shoulder seasons and what previously were considered "non-peak" times. This is evidenced in changes to monthly visitation trends over the past few years. It also stands to reason that with weather patterns changing, there is some disruption to what were 'typical' trends in outdoor participation.
- According to a 2022 study released earlier this year, most Montanans (71%) still view that the overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts, however, this estimate declined from 76% compared with the prior year. Also of note is that the perception of 'crowding' may be changing. Fifty-six percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the state is becoming overcrowded because of more tourists, though this is a rather nuanced attitude.³

Stepping back, it is important to note that tourism and travel related to outdoor recreation are core to Montana's economic resiliency. Visitors to state parks, fishing access sites, wildlife management areas, and other public lands provide important contributions in terms of tax revenue, job creation, workforce diversity, and sustenance for small businesses and entrepreneurs that often are key to the success of Montana's communities.

FWP's diligence in data collection and understanding visitor use are key factors in informing the agency's ability to manage recreation while upholding its responsibility for preserving and protecting critical natural, historic, and cultural resources. Such data should also inform decisions surrounding staffing levels, expenditures for improvements and maintenance at sites, as well as visitor use policies, and site management planning so that there is truly opportunity and access for all in the future.

¹ **2021 Nonresident Visitation, Expenditures, and Economic Impact Estimates** - https://scholarworks.umt.edu/itrr_pubs/430/

² **2021 Montana Newcomers Report** - <https://www.msuextension.org/communitydevelopment/newcomerresearch.html>

³ **Montana Residents: Attitudes Towards Tourism 2021** - https://scholarworks.umt.edu/itrr_pubs/428/

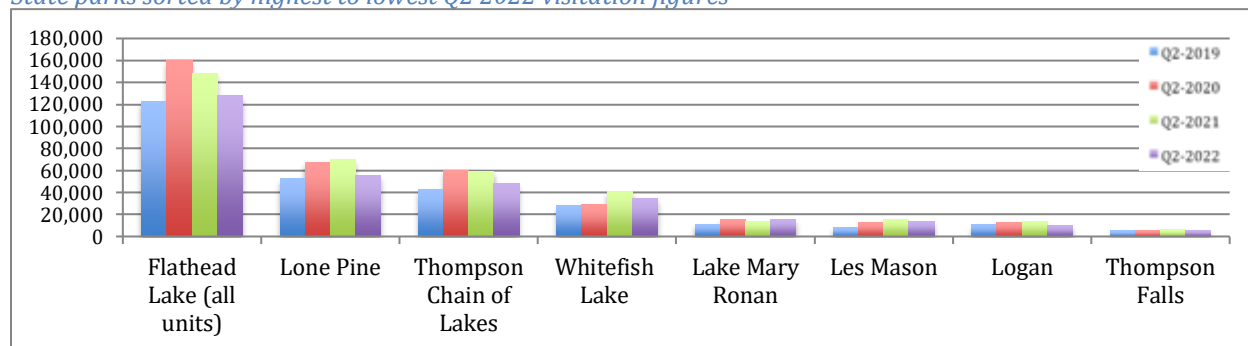
Region 1

Region 1 welcomed an estimated **311,770** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents a **15.4%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, a drop of **14.2%** below 2020, and a **10.5%** increase over 2019. For this year, Region 1's visitation constituted **25.0%** of the state's total visitation. By comparison, in 2021, the region's visitation represented **23.6%** of the state's total visitation, in 2020 it was **25.7%**, and in 2019 it was **25.9%**.

Flathead Lake was the second most visited park in the state during the first half of the year; Lone Pine was seventh; and Thompson Chain of Lakes was eighth. The brief cold spells at the beginning of the year followed by a cold, wet spring kept visitation down at several sites. By contrast, staff members report that on a mild or sunny day, their sites often fill. Recently, for example, several sites had to be closed as parking lots reached their maximum capacity. It also stands to note that a factor that influences trends in the region's visitation is changes at nearby Glacier National Park. In 2020, Glacier was closed until June due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and then instituted a new, ticketed entry system. This continues to create spillover impacts for many of the region's state parks. It should be noted that new counters were added across the region in 2021-22, which could have contributed to some of the visitation growth.

Region 1 - State park estimates (Jan.-Jun.)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2022 visitation figures

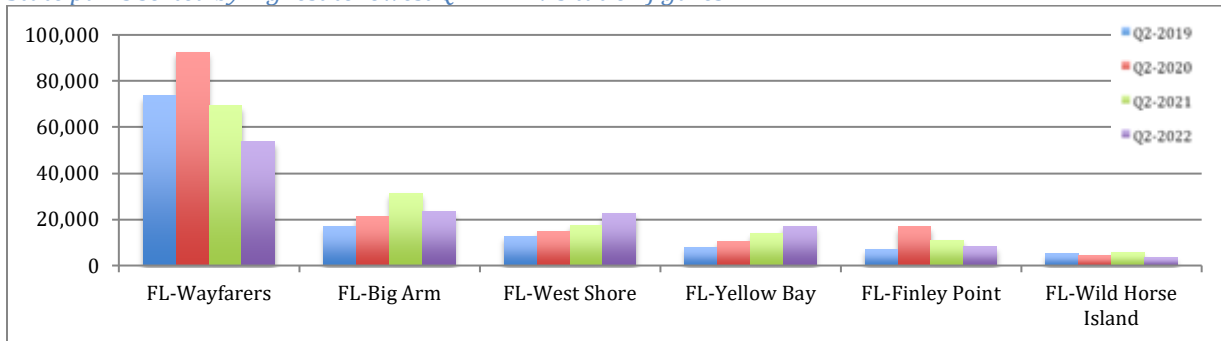


Park	Q2 2019	Q2 2020	Q2 2021	Q2 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Flathead Lake (all units)	123,140	160,403	148,369	128,472	-13.4%
Lone Pine	52,443	67,594	70,433	55,268	-21.5%
Thompson Chain of Lakes	42,887	60,154	59,167	48,359	-18.3%
Whitefish Lake	28,082	28,732	41,107	34,685	-15.6%
Lake Mary Ronan	11,293	15,320	13,611	15,474	13.7%
Les Mason	8,236	12,518	15,554	13,679	-12.1%
Logan	10,835	12,791	13,999	10,118	-27.7%
Thompson Falls	5,214	5,713	6,261	5,715	-8.7%
	282,130	363,225	368,501	311,770	-15.4%

NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at the N. Shore unit of Flathead Lake or at Somers Beach. Also of note is that the gates at the vehicular entrances of Les Mason and Thompson Falls are seasonally closed during earlier parts of the year, thus estimates solely reflect walk-in visitors.

Region 1 - Flathead Lake Unit estimates (January-June)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2022 visitation figures



Flathead Lake unit	Q2 2019	Q2 2020	Q2 2021	Q2 2022	Change between 2021-2022
FL-Wayfarers	73,647	92,556	69,197	53,616	-22.5%
FL-Big Arm	16,953	21,226	31,387	23,465	-25.2%
FL-West Shore	12,588	14,767	17,331	22,540	30.1%
FL-Yellow Bay	7,843	10,627	13,811	17,074	23.6%
FL-Finley Point	6,938	16,770	11,019	8,156	-26.0%
FL-Wild Horse Island	5,171	4,457	5,624	3,621	-35.6%
	123,140	160,403	148,369	128,472	-13.4%

NOTE: The entrance gate is seasonally closed during much of the winter at the Finley Point unit of Flathead Lake.

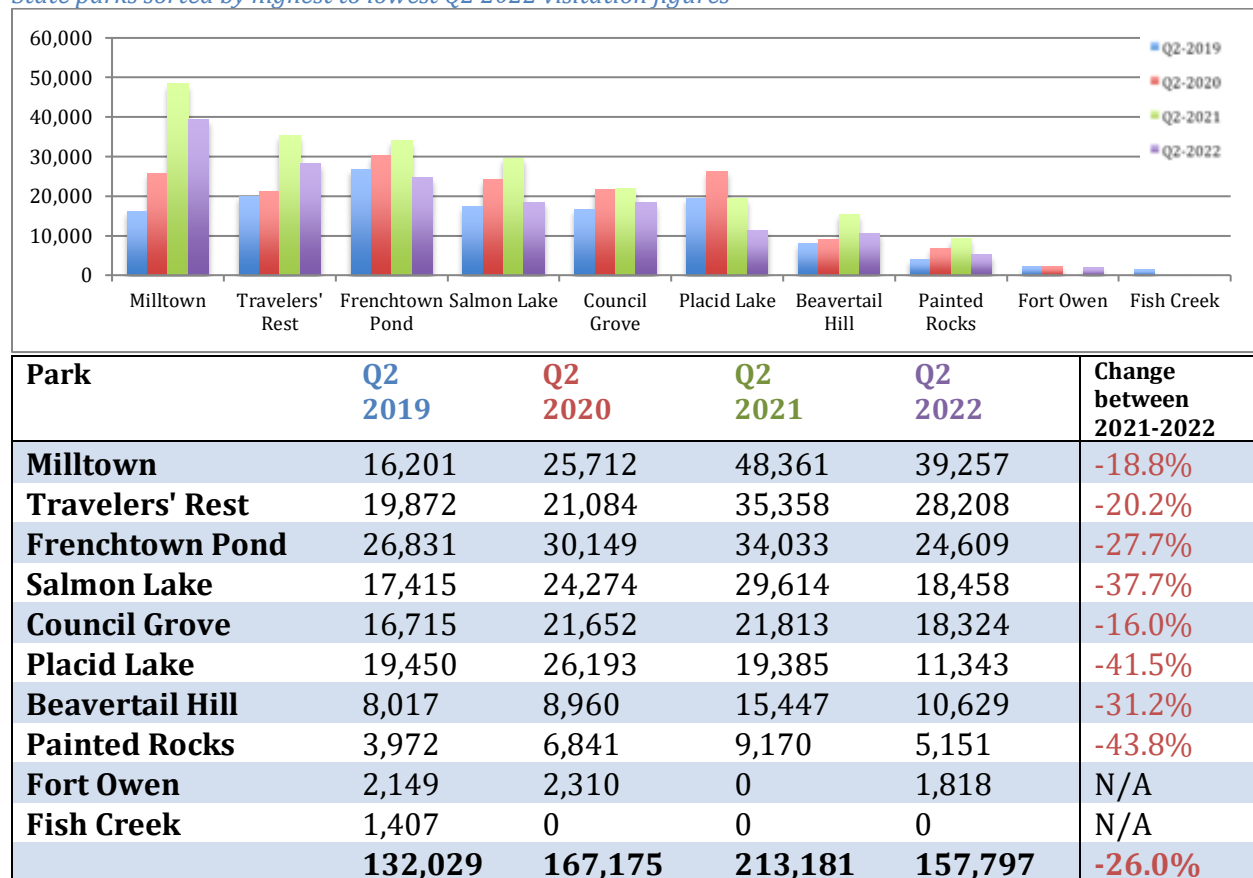
Region 2

Region 2 welcomed an estimated **157,797** visitors across its nine parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents a **26.0%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, a slight drop of **5.6%** below 2020, and a **19.5%** increase over 2019. For this year, Region 2's visitation constituted **12.7%** of the state's total visitation. By comparison, in 2021 the region's visitation represented **13.6%** of the state's total visitation, in 2020 it was **11.8%**, and in 2019 it was **12.1%**.

For the first time in quite some time, all parks in Region 2 experienced a decrease in visitation during the first half of the year. The brief cold spells at the beginning of the year followed by a cold, wet spring kept visitation down, and particularly at sites offering overnight accommodations. Milltown was the most visited park in the region and the tenth most visited park in the state this year. Travelers' Rest was not that far behind. It should be noted that new counters were added across the region in 2021-22, which could have contributed to some of the visitation growth.

Region 2 - State park estimates (January-June)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2022 visitation figures



NOTE: Visitation data at Fish Creek will be collected later this year. It also should be noted that construction at Fort Owen closed the park in 2021.

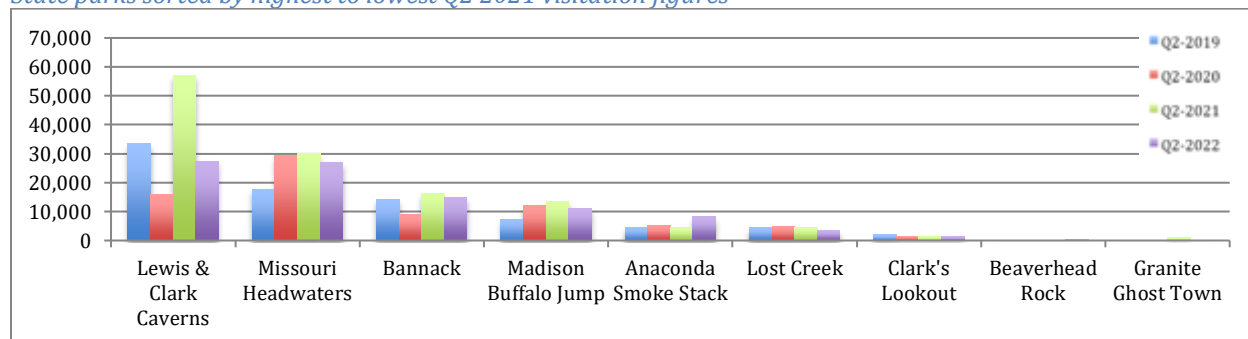
Region 3

Region 3 welcomed an estimated **93,531** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents a **27.0%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, an increase of **19.5%** above 2020, and a **12.0%** increase over 2019. For this year, Region 3's visitation constituted **7.5%** of the state's total visitation. By comparison, in 2021 the region's visitation represented **8.2%** of the state's total visitation, in 2020 it was **5.5%**, and in 2019 it was **7.7%**.

Lewis & Clark Caverns was the most visited park in the region this year, while Missouri Headwaters was not far behind. The brief cold spells at the beginning of the year followed by a cold, wet spring generally kept visitation down. It should be noted that in 2020, both Lewis & Clark Caverns and Bannack were impacted by COVID-19 precautions, and so their visitation growth since then is not surprising. (Cave tours at the Caverns were cut back and there was a temporary closure at Bannack.) New for this year, staff members at Beaverhead Rock are now collecting visitation data. It should also be noted that new counters were added across the region in 2021-22, which could have contributed to some of the growth at the region's parks.

Region 3 - State park estimates (January-June)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures



Park	Q2 2019	Q2 2020	Q2 2021	Q2 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Lewis & Clark Caverns	33,408	15,761	57,177	27,454	-52.0%
Missouri Headwaters	17,679	29,541	29,942	26,889	-10.2%
Bannack	14,173	9,071	16,376	14,793	-9.7%
Madison Buffalo Jump	7,382	12,103	13,525	11,160	-17.5%
Anaconda Smokestack	4,475	5,260	4,338	8,150	87.9%
Lost Creek	4,396	5,013	4,476	3,548	-20.7%
Clark's Lookout	2,015	1,531	1,366	1,375	0.7%
Beaverhead Rock	0	0	0	162	N/A
Granite Ghost Town	0	0	906	0	N/A
	83,528	78,280	128,106	93,531	-27.0%

NOTE: Visitation data was collected for the first time at Beaverhead Rock in June. Estimates for Granite Ghost Town have not been available in 2022. Also of note is that Clark's Lookout is seasonally closed during the winter months.

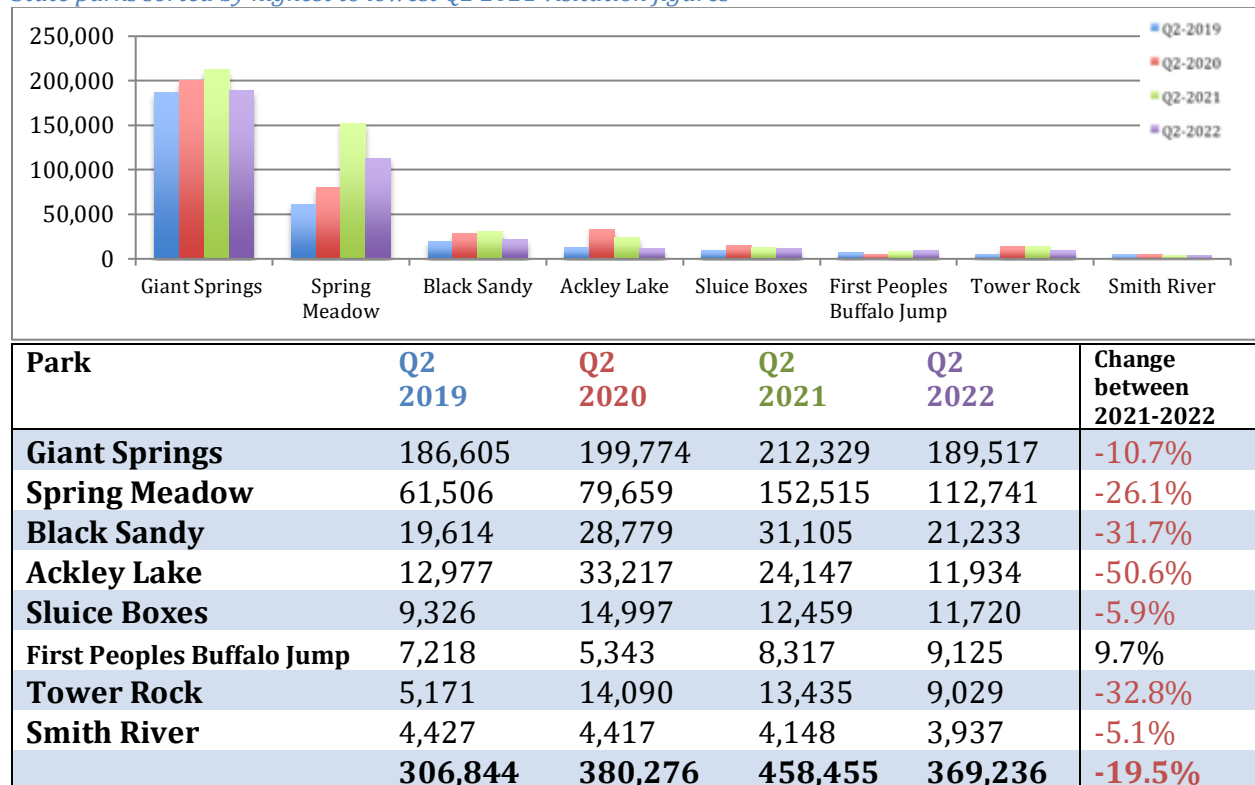
Region 4

Region 4 welcomed an estimated **369,236** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents a **19.5%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, a slight drop of **2.9%** below 2020, and a **20.3%** increase over 2019. For this year, Region 4's visitation constituted **29.6%** of the state's total visitation. By comparison, in 2021, the region's visitation represented **29.3%** of the state's total visitation, in 2020 it was **26.9%**, and in 2019 it was **28.2%**.

Giant Springs was the state's most visited park during the first half of the year while Spring Meadow Lake was the third. Their co-locations to Great Falls and Helena, respectively, attract numerous residents seeking to recreate outdoors. First People's Buffalo Jump was the only park that experienced year over year growth in 2021 and 2022. Part of this growth could be due to the suspension of public programs and school field trips in 2020 due to the COVID-19 health pandemic. Another unique trend that occurred in the region impacted Smith River floating - opportunities to enjoy the river tapered during the past two years due to abnormally low water conditions. Last, it should be noted that new counters were added across the region in 2021-22, which could have contributed to some of the growth at the region's parks.

Region 4 - State park estimates (January-June)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures



NOTE: Visitation data for the Smith River is recorded using floater registration forms and does not include non-floater visits to Camp Baker or Eden Bridge. Additionally, in April 2022 administration for Elkhorn Ghost Town was transitioned to Region 3. Visitation data is not regularly collected at Marias River.

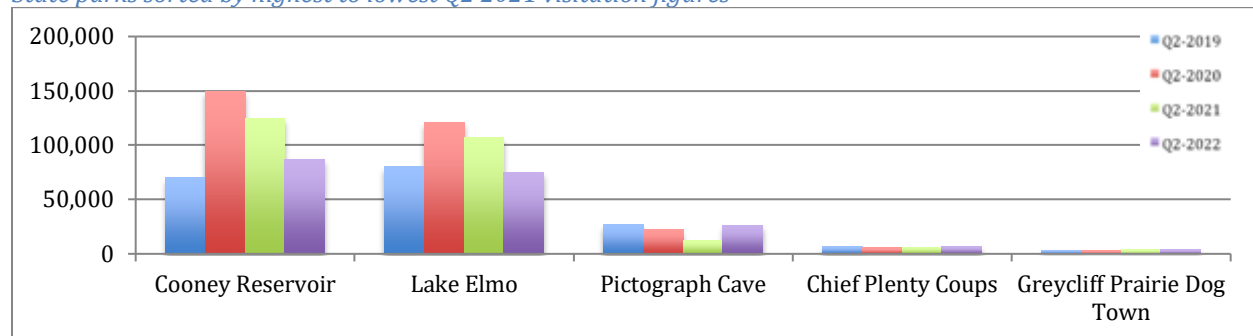
Region 5

Region 5 welcomed an estimated **199,545** visitors across its five parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents a **21.3%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, a drop of **33.7%** below 2020, and a slight **6.6%** increase over 2019. For this year, Region 5's visitation constituted **16.0%** of the state's total visitation. By comparison, in 2021, the region's visitation represented **16.2%** of the state's total visitation, in 2020 it was **21.3%**, and in 2019 it was **17.2%**.

Cooney Reservoir was the most visited park in the region and the fourth most visited park in the state in 2022. Lake Elmo was not far behind and was the fifth most visited park in the state. The brief cold spells at the beginning of the year followed by a cold, wet spring generally kept visitation down, and this was particularly true for Cooney Reservoir. By contrast, growth at Pictograph Cave rebounded in 2022. (Last year the park incurred a four-month closure caused by a rock fall that blocked the park road entrance.) Lake Elmo's visitation also grew, yet it should be noted that last year, the park attracted fewer residents than normal while the lake was drained and construction around the lake occurred. Last, visitation at Chief Plenty Coups has continued to grow and this year brought back many group activities once again. It should be noted that new counters were added across the region in 2021-22, which could have contributed to some of the growth at the region's parks.

Region 5 - State park estimates (January-June)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures



Park	Q2 2019	Q2 2020	Q2 2021	Q2 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Cooney Reservoir	69,892	149,650	124,834	87,191	-30.2%
Lake Elmo	80,147	120,747	106,754	75,122	-29.6%
Pictograph Cave	26,585	22,083	11,936	26,405	121.2%
Chief Plenty Coups	7,025	5,491	6,200	6,915	11.5%
Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	3,523	2,921	3,842	3,912	1.8%
	187,172	300,892	253,566	199,545	-21.3%

NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Yellowstone River. Also of note is that Greycliff Prairie Dog Town is seasonally closed during winter months and Pictograph Cave was closed temporarily in 2021. Last, since data was unavailable for Lake Elmo in June, an average of the past three years for June was used. Visitation at the park in 2021 was impacted by necessary draining of the lake due to invasive clams, and surrounding construction on the trails and shore.

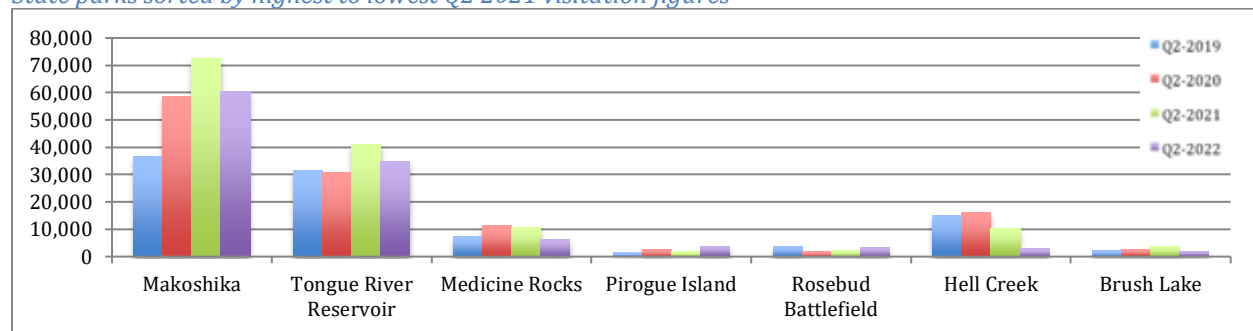
Regions 6 and 7

Regions 6 and 7 welcomed an estimated **113,748** visitors across its seven parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents a **20.2%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, a drop of **8.2%** below 2020, and a **16.5%** increase over 2019. For this year, Regions 6 and 7 's visitation constituted **9.1%** of the state's total visitation. By comparison, in 2021, the region's visitation also represented **9.1%** of the state's total visitation, in 2020 it was **8.8%**, and in 2019 it was **9.0%**.

Makoshika was the most visited park in the region and the sixth most visited park in the state. Tongue River Reservoir was the second most visited park in the region and the tenth most visited park in the state. The brief cold spells at the beginning of the year followed by a cold, wet spring generally kept visitation down, and this was particularly true for Tongue River Reservoir. By contrast, visitation grew at Rosebud Battlefield and Pirogue Island. It should be noted, however, that new counters were added across the region in 2021-22, which could have contributed to some of the growth at the region's parks. Additionally, it is important to advise that March 2022 marked the last year in which visitation was recorded for Hell Creek. FWP turned management of the park over to the Little Shell tribe, who is now overseeing all facets of site operations.

Regions 6 and 7 - State park estimates (January-June)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures



Park	Q2 2019	Q2 2020	Q2 2021	Q2 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Makoshika	36,713	58,470	72,650	60,595	-16.6%
Tongue River Reservoir	31,568	30,732	41,182	34,964	-15.1%
Medicine Rocks	7,227	11,346	10,593	6,155	-41.9%
Pirogue Island	1,373	2,565	1,743	3,822	119.2%
Rosebud Battlefield	3,529	1,871	2,153	3,376	56.8%
Hell Creek	15,092	16,141	10,460	2,808	-73.2%
Brush Lake	2,125	2,770	3,727	2,028	-45.6%
	97,627	123,895	142,508	113,748	-20.2%

NOTE: Brush Lake is seasonally closed in the winter months. Visitation data was not collected after March 2022 at Hell Creek.

2019-2022 Year to Date Visitation (January-June)

Parks sorted by highest total 2022 visitation

REGION	PARK	Q2-2019	Q2-2020	Q2-2021	Q2-2022
4	Giant Springs	186,605	199,774	212,329	189,517
1	Flathead Lake (all units)	123,140	160,403	148,369	128,472
4	Spring Meadow	61,506	79,659	152,515	112,741
5	Cooney Reservoir	69,892	149,650	124,834	87,191
5	Lake Elmo	80,147	120,747	106,754	75,122
6/7	Makoshika	36,713	58,470	72,650	60,595
1	Lone Pine	52,443	67,594	70,433	55,268
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	42,887	60,154	59,167	48,359
2	Milltown	16,201	25,712	48,361	39,257
6/7	Tongue River Reservoir	31,568	30,732	41,182	34,964
1	Whitefish Lake	28,082	28,732	41,107	34,685
2	Travelers' Rest	19,872	21,084	35,358	28,208
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	33,408	15,761	57,177	27,454
3	Missouri Headwaters	17,679	29,541	29,942	26,889
5	Pictograph Cave	26,585	22,083	11,936	26,405
2	Frenchtown Pond	26,831	30,149	34,033	24,609
4	Black Sandy	19,614	28,779	31,105	21,233
2	Salmon Lake	17,415	24,274	29,614	18,458
2	Council Grove	16,715	21,652	21,813	18,324
1	Lake Mary Ronan	11,293	15,320	13,611	15,474
3	Bannack	14,173	9,071	16,376	14,793
1	Les Mason	8,236	12,518	15,554	13,679
4	Ackley Lake	12,977	33,217	24,147	11,934
4	Sluice Boxes	9,326	14,997	12,459	11,720
2	Placid Lake	19,450	26,193	19,385	11,343
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	7,382	12,103	13,525	11,160
2	Beavertail Hill	8,017	8,960	15,447	10,629
1	Logan	10,835	12,791	13,999	10,118
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	7,218	5,343	8,317	9,125
4	Tower Rock	5,171	14,090	13,435	9,029
3	Anaconda Smokestack	4,475	5,260	4,338	8,150
5	Chief Plenty Coups	7,025	5,491	6,200	6,915
6/7	Medicine Rocks	7,227	11,346	10,593	6,155
1	Thompson Falls	5,214	5,713	6,261	5,715
2	Painted Rocks	3,972	6,841	9,170	5,151
4	Smith River	4,427	4,417	4,148	3,937
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	3,523	2,921	3,842	3,912
6/7	Pirogue Island	1,373	2,565	1,743	3,822
3	Lost Creek	4,396	5,013	4,476	3,548
6/7	Rosebud Battlefield	3,529	1,871	2,153	3,376
6/7	Hell Creek	15,092	16,141	10,460	2,808
6/7	Brush Lake	2,125	2,770	3,727	2,028
2	Fort Owen	2,149	2,310	0	1,818

REGION	PARK	Q2-2019	Q2-2020	Q2-2021	Q2-2022
3	Clark's Lookout	2,015	1,531	1,366	1,375
3	Beaverhead Rock	0	0	0	162
2	Fish Creek	1,407	0	0	0
3	Granite Ghost Town	0	0	906	0
		1,089,330	1,413,743	1,564,317	1,245,627

Seasonal Closures During Winter Months

REGION	STATE PARK	COMMENTS
1	FL - Finley Point unit	Gates closed; walk in estimates only
1	Les Mason	Gates closed; walk in estimates only
1	Thompson Falls	Gates closed; walk in estimates only
2	Beavertail Hill	Seasonal closure
2	Placid Lake	Seasonal closure
2	Salmon Lake	Seasonal closure
3	Clark's Lookout	Seasonal closure
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	Seasonal closure
6/7	Brush Lake	Seasonal closure

State Parks Where Data Is Not Regularly Collected

REGION	STATE PARK	COMMENTS
1	FL - N. Shore unit	No data collection
1	FL - Somers Beach	Will begin in 2022
2	Fish Creek	Will begin in 2022
4	Marias River	No data collection
5	Yellowstone River	No data collection

REPORT NOTES:

Visitation data is typically based on reported estimates from 46 of Montana's 55 state parks. In the winter, some parks and/or campground entrances are seasonally closed. While the system does experience some off-season camping, numbers are generally low.

Staff members are currently working with experts at the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) to gain assistance with revising the system's visitation methodology. Additionally, park staff members have been in the process of adding counting devices to entrances where either existing counters were nearing the end of their useful life, or there simply were not counters installed.

In some cases, the methodological formulas for calculating visitation estimates changed in June 2022. Such changes are informed by quantitative and qualitative data analysis that was performed beginning in 2020. It should also be noted that occasionally staff might determine the need to make slight revisions to previous month totals to improve accuracy.

For questions about this report, contact Charlie Sperry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division Assistant Administrator, at csperry@mt.gov or at (406) 444-3888.